

## **Special Program Review of UAF eLearning and Distance Education**

**January 9, 2015**

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### **INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY**

eLearning and distance education are in the midst of large changes, both at UAF and most higher education institutions. Changing technology, improved connectivity, and people's increasing comfort with online offerings for all manner of products and services has caused people to expect college classes to be online as well. The structure of distance education, formerly offered through the Center for Distance Education in CRCED, now structured as eLearning and Distance Education, has seen a lot of changes at UAF in recent years.

Those changes have led to several previous studies on distance education at UAF. In 2013 the UA system-wide report, the *Report on University of Alaska e-Learning* was presented to the Board of Regents. At the same time, *E-learning across UAF: 2013* was prepared that addressed many of the challenges and opportunities facing UAF as we move forward. eLearning has continued to change so rapidly that even with the availability of those recent reports, the Committee felt more current information was warranted. It requested that the Office of e-Learning and Distance Education (eLearning) conduct a self-assessment that builds on those documents and looks to the future. That assessment: *UAF e-Learning & Distance Education Self-Study Draft 3.1* is included as an appendix to this report.

eLearning's report was very thorough, but the Committee wanted to collect data from other perspectives. To gauge the impact and perceptions of eLearning at UAF, the Committee asked UAF Deans to answer a number of questions about their experiences with eLearning. The Committee also sent a three question survey to other schools and colleges to which it had access via membership in higher education related associations. Data were requested and received from schools in the PAC12 +3, other WICHE institutions, and from EDUCause. Individual committee members also reached out informally to their counterparts at UAA and UAS for information. The results of those surveys are incorporated in this narrative. The Committee also reviewed all available financial data for eLearning.

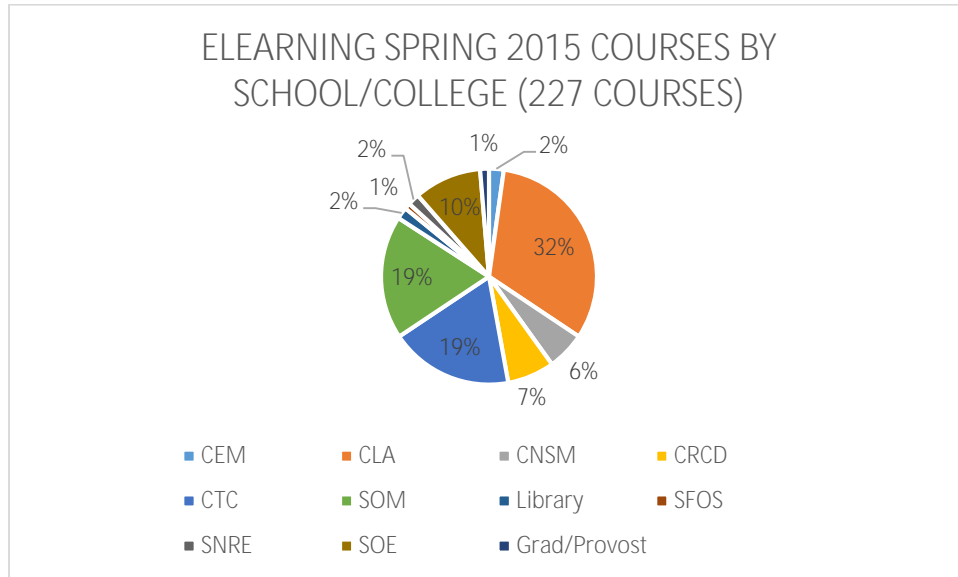
Historically, classes offered through the Center for Distance Education (CDE) were correspondence study courses with instructors functioning primarily as paper graders. The unit operated as a separate academic unit with a full range of student and faculty support services. In its current incarnation, eLearning is a new entity having only been around since arising from the former CDE in May 2012. eLearning's current funding structure is even newer with just three

semesters completed. Initially, eLearning continued to offer yearlong (open enrollment) courses and print based courses as CDE had. Both of those types of offerings have been phased out in the last several years. In their 2014 self-study, eLearning reports that the operations have been streamlined for consistency and effectiveness.

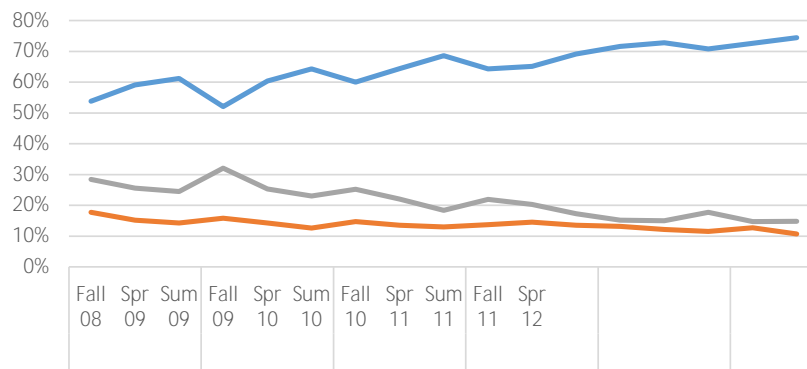
eLearning also inherited a piecemeal approach for tuition sharing and paying instructors that had every unit doing something different. Beginning Fall 2013, a new tuition sharing model was implemented. For Fairbanks campus courses the tuition split is 60% to the unit and 40% to eLearning except for CRCD where 75% of tuition from eLearning goes to CRCD and eLearning keeps 25%. Under the current model, the units pay the instructors. This new structure was designed to “hold harmless” the various academic units and as a result, eLearning now functions with two different fiscal models; UAF as a whole has five different systems. In FY14 under the current model, eLearning generated \$3.3 million in tuition (from 27,801 SCH) that went to the schools, colleges and rural campuses who hired and paid instructors.

	Regular, in-person Fairbanks campus academic	eLearning (only includes 100% asynchronous classes)	Summer Sessions, Maymester, Wintermester	CRCD/CTC
Tuition	Academic unit: 60% Central (Admin Services): 40%	Fairbanks Campus: Academic Unit: 60% Central 0% eLearning: 40% CRCD (including CTC): Academic Unit: 75% Central 0% eLearning: 25%	Academic Unit: 0% Central 0%	

to streamline their education and develop new skills. Beginning Summer 2014 eLearning has been offering semester-length classes using the same tuition model in effect the rest of the year, with 195 courses scheduled to be taught in the 2015 Spring Semester. With increased enrollment, it's imperative that we choose a revenue model that not only works but continues to allow UAF's distance education to grow and stay ahead of the curve as technology changes for distance offerings.



eLearning has moved to a more structured model that moves students through courses as a cohort and follows up with struggling students at two key points during the semester. As a result, student success rates (final grade of C- or better) have increased from 58% in FY07 to 74% in FY14.



UAF, as with all online university offerings, needs state authorization to offer online courses to students in other states. This fall UAF was accepted as a participating institution in the Statewide

Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA) initiative which allows us to offer classes to students in other states. There are currently 11 other states where UAF can offer online courses; this number is expected to continue to grow. eLearning offers about 200 courses each semester. The UAF core curriculum is now fully online as are the 17 complete programs shown below.

#### Graduate Degrees

- Administration of Justice, M.A. (College of Liberal Arts)
- Masters of Education track in Online Innovation and Design, M.Ed. (School of Education)
- Master of Business Administration, M.B.A. (School of Management)

#### Bachelor Degrees

- Homeland Security and Emergency Management, B.E.M. (School of Management)
- Justice, B.A. (College of Liberal Arts)

#### Associate Degrees

- Applied Accounting, A.A.S. (Community & Technical College)
- Applied Business, A.A.S. (Community & Technical College)
- Healthcare Management
- Human Resources Management
- Marketing
- Public Administration
- Associate of Arts, A.A. (Community & Technical College)

#### Certificates

- Accounting Technician (Community & Technical College)
- Applied Business Management (Community & Technical College)
- Design and Construction Management Graduate Certificate (College of Engineering and Mines)
- Healthcare Reimbursement (Kuskokwim Campus)
- Medical and Dental Reception (Kuskokwim Campus)

#### Occupational Endorsements

- Bookkeeping Technician (Community & Technical College)
- Medical Billing (Kuskokwim Campus)
- Medical Coding (Kuskokwim Campus)
- Medical Office Reception (Kuskokwim Campus)

eLearning has three key areas it is focusing on: improving access to higher education, empowering students to successfully complete eLearning classes, and supporting students in finishing their degrees. eLearning offers five core services: program development (course development), student support (for students in eLearning courses), student assessment (exam proctoring), faculty development and support (iTeach, etc.), and innovation (keeping up with trends in online learning). eLearning aligns and supports academic units under the new model.

In addition to efforts by eLearning, CRCD--through its rural campuses--has provided and continues to provide “distance” course alternatives. Many of these courses are done without the support or interaction with eLearning (which can be confusing to students). Many Fairbanks campus programs also offer courses outside the traditional in-class approach. Most of these efforts are “synchronous” with an instructor lecturing to students face-to-face and/or via video or audio, “flipped” where the students view taped lectures or notes prior to coming to class, or a combination of the various deliveries. To better define these concepts, the *E-Learning Across UAF: 2013* report defines “e-learning” as 0% location based, “blended” as 1-20% and 21-50% location-based, and “traditional” as greater than 50% location based, but even these definitions confuse “e-learning” and “distance learning.”

As eLearning better defines its role relative to the other units at UAF, the dividing line of “asynchronous” for eLearning and “synchronous” for courses offered through schools and colleges, has been used. However as discussed above, this line is blurred when “blended” courses are considered. This blurring has a direct impact on the revenue model for eLearning and impacts the quality of UAF’s offerings. Departments are developing courses that have a significant asynchronous or distance component but do not use the resources of eLearning. The tuition to the department is the same whether they use eLearning or not. The advantage to the department is that they would not have to support an instructional designer. The disadvantage is that we are not making good use of the designers to provide the best product to our students. How can academic programs better partner with the services that eLearning can provide?

## **ANALYSIS**

### **Department, School and College Opinions and Analysis**

A survey of open and close-ended questions was sent out to School and College deans at UAF. Responses were received from the Career and Technical College, the School of Management, the School of Education, the School of Natural Resources and Extension, the College of Natural Science and Mathematics, and the College of Liberal Arts. Respondents included individual deans, individual deans with faculty input, and in one instance, from an individual dean that included direct responses from at least three faculty members.

According to respondents, the numbers and percentages of eLearning courses currently offered varied greatly with each school or college. The exception was the School of Management that has its entire program online. All respondents indicated that they intended to increase online course offerings through eLearning. Reasons for these intentions included student demand, remaining competitive with other institutions, increasing student enrollment, and the costs associated with offering face-to-



online courses at their university. The dean at UAS indicated that the departments only received



Again, like UAF, there are numerous tuition cost models, even in the same institution. For the sake of brevity: UW's is fee based and not available through regular tuition; OSU has a higher tuition for "ecampus" courses; UO has same tuition as F2F classes though with an exception when run through the Academic Extension unit where the tuition is higher than in-state tuition yet much lower than out-of-state tuition; UHM's tuition, with a few exceptions for cohort programs, h(ohthoug)w29[a]4( fe)7(w )-7(e)4(x)-9(c)4(e)4(pti)-3(o5of)(r th-

## **Fiscal Analysis and Forecast**

FY14 represented the first year of the revised fiscal model for tuition distribution. With the transfer of responsibility for paying instructors to the units, expenditures were reduced 27 percent from \$4.6 million to \$3.3 million. At the same time units started to receive 60 percent of tuition (75 percent for CTC) causing income from tuition and fees to drop 44 percent from \$4.2 million to \$2.3 million. Part of this shortfall was made up by a substantial increase in GF. Eighty-two percent of the expenditures for eLearning are in salaries and benefits. The second largest expenditure (13 percent) is in contractual services including the lease of the offices on University Avenue which ends this summer.

There are a lot of uncertainties with regard to eLearning's budget and future, but one thing is currently known: eLearning offers several different types of course delivery that have various cost and revenue

and depth of this review we were unable to identify if eLearning has ever had a successful standalone funding model. They report being on track to finish the year within budget.

eLearning revenue and expenditure data from FY08 thru FY14 shows that only two years of funding in their history since FY08 (FY08 & FY11) have NOT been in the red. It's unclear with the exception of FY14 why eLearning continued to run large deficits outside of the inconsistent funding models. We do know that FY14's financial setback was due to revenue model changes made early in the year that were not anticipated. eLearning was separated from CRCDC in 2012 and moved under the Chancellor's Office, the revenue model was changed and base support from CRCDC was swapped for a 75/25 tuition model along with changes to the allocation of summer tuition creating a net effect of \$-1.2M approximately half of which was absorbed by central.

With eLearning returning to the Fairbanks campus, their fiscal situation will be changing yet again. They will no longer have to cover the lease for their space on University Avenue (~\$200k/yr), however they will be using campus facilities and so a model where they support the central administration will need to be implemented. In addition they will have to pay for VOIP phones, OIT services, student parking and UAF caterETtmkTBT/Subtype1 268.85 556.3 Tm0 0 1.sornue model





## Recommendations:

The current fiscal and structural model has only been in place for one year so it is difficult to assess whether it would stabilize eLearning's finances. One basic recommendation for the cabinet to consider is to let the model play out for another year to see if the current growth continues and if both eLearning and the units can see results that stabilize eLearning's fiscal house. If it does, it is possible that eLearning could be self-sufficient in its current configuration and staffing, however the move on campus provides an opportunity to look at different models described above that could produce savings, especially in the area of duplicated or shared services.

1. To synchronize eLearning with traditional academic units, UAF administration needs to incentivize collaboration between the two. Faculty who have been teaching traditional classes look at developing eLearning offerings as extra work and are generally not open to changing what they have been doing. A report published in 2010 by The Advisory Board Company entitled *Engaging Faculty in Online Education* found that lack of incentives to encourage faculty to buy in was the greatest barrier to expanding offerings. As expressed in the surveys, many academic units and their associated faculty will not support expending funds on developing courses if they feel that they are taking away students from traditional courses or increasing faculty workload with little in return.
2. eLearning needs to better market its course design services to schools and colleges (including CRCD) with standard price structures and products. Right now if a unit wants a course designed, there isn't a clear cost structure.
3. Like other units on campus, eLearning will need to contribute part of its revenue to Administrative Services to support its on-campus offices.
4. CDE and now eLearning developed as a stand-alone entity with its own support staffing. Once they are integrated on campus there is a possibility for shared services:
  - a. eLearning student support functions should be integrated with UAF admissions and advising (eLearning currently has six positions in this office).
  - b. eLearning IT should be integrated with OIT. (eLearning currently has two positions in this office).
5. eLearning and the academic units should focus on courses and degree programs that take advantage of the unique opportunities and challenges that Alaska has with regard to our position in the arctic, close ties to rural communities and specialized education. This will create a niche for eLearning that would make it competitive with other national distance education competitors.